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ABSTRACT

How schools can reach out to students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds was studied by examining the experiences of four families with students enrolled in a middle school in New York City. Also studied were families' perceptions of the school's efforts to reach out. The school's student body was 47% Latino and 34% African American, and 81% of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The staff was less diverse than the student body; eight of the nine full-time teachers were Caucasian. The school used interrelated approaches to reach out to students and their families. These included: (1) building a strong school community; (2) attending to students' personal and social needs; (3) emphasizing learning through experience; and (4) providing expanded learning opportunities, especially for students with learning disabilities. In spite of the good intentions of the school staff, the parents often perceived the efforts to reach out as inadequate or as not relevant to the students' cultural backgrounds. Many misunderstandings actually arose from the school's efforts to reach out. Perceptions of the success of school efforts were mediated by the families' expectations. (Contains 2 tables and 25 references.) (SLD)

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REACHING OUT TO FAMILIES FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS: A CASE STUDY

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Over the past two decades, researchers from various perspectives have documented the failure of the public school to pervasively reach those from less socially advantaged strata: including students of color, new immigrants, the poor, females, and second-language learners. A wide range of strategies has been proposed to facilitate learning with each of these groups of students (Comer, 1988, 1993; Garcia, 1991; Kohl, 1991; Orenstein, 1994; Rose, 1989; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Recently, the concept of and need for culturally relevant pedagogy are increasingly gaining currency, led by Ladson-Billings (1994 & 1995), based on her study of seven successful teachers of African American students. This fast developing field has propelled Osborne (1996) to conduct a literature review on culturally relevant pedagogy for students who had been marginalized and normalized. He organized a body of ethnographies on teaching in cross-cultural and multiethnic settings over last thirty years, around Ladson-Billings' proposition that students must experience success, develop cultural competence, and critical consciousness. He formulated nine assertions and discussed each of them in detail, followed by a list of studies that both confirms and disconfirms the assertions. These assertions center on both fundamental understandings (e.g., socio-historico-political realities beyond the school, students' previous experiences, first languages, and their natal cultural identity) and classroom processes (e.g., instructional approaches, cultural assumptions in the classroom, and classroom management).

While an increasing amount of attention has been devoted to how to improve the teaching of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, relatively little research has been done on how to reach out and involve their parents and families, even though there is a concensus in the research community that parent and family invovlement is desirable and beneficial. In his literature review, for example, Osborne (1996) included one assertion on the desirability of involving the parents and families of children from marginalized groups. He found that "those who have investigated the issue have comprehensively supported it."

However, "the issue of parental involvement has not been investigated widely by interpretive ethnographers." (1996, p.294)

Similarly, in his review on Family, Community, and School Collaboration, Arvizu (1996) found indisputable evidence that "when parents are involved, children do better in school, and they go to better schools." (p.814) Likewise, based on a review of studies over a quarter century, Hidalgo, Siu, Bright, Swap, and Epstein (1995) draw the same conclusion that children benefit from parent involvement. For them, the question become: If family involvment is important, how can schools help more families become involved in ways that help their children succeed in school?

Hidalgo et al. (1995) noted that researchers were beginning to examine what schools and families do together to support and enhance student learning. They identified one area that needs further investigation as "the nature of school, family, and community partnerships for families and children with diverse cultural backgrounds." (Hidalgo et al., 1995. p. 499) This area deserves our attention, because "different types of schools, families, and communities require different strategies for involving parents. Cross-cultural strategies for achieving parent participation have not explicitly been explored in the reseach literature." (Arvizu, 1996. p.814)

This area deserves closer attention also because of ongoing dynamic demographic change in our society. In 1991, in a special section on parent involvement in Phi Delta Kappan, Gough observed that "an increasing proportion of parents do not share the same cultural background as the teachers who deal daily with their youngster." (p.1) This trend continues, as the number of students from diverse cultural backgrounds increases and the number of teachers from those groups decreases (Delpit, 1995; Kailin, 1994; Hidalgo, Siu, Bright, Swap & Epstein, 1995; Zeichner, 1993). As we must increasingly depend on teachers who do not from the same ethnic minority group as their students to teach them in classrooms, we also increasingly depend on these teachers to reach out to families from varying backgrounds.

In her influential book on Other People's Children, Delpit (1995) argued that the answers to better educate poor children and children of color "lie not in a proliferation of new reform programs but in some basic understanding of who we are and how we are connected to and disconnected from one another." (p. xv) She further observed that, for too long, poor people and people of color have had others "determine who they are, how they should act, [and] how they are to be judged." [p. xv]

This call for a *basic understanding* is particularly important for reaching out to families from diverse backgrounds. To better educate "other people's children," we must understand what is in *other people's minds.* How do they view themselves? How do they view the world around them? What is important to them? What do they want for their children?

Influenced by the existing literature, the purpose of this study was to shed light on how schools might reach out to students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. I examined the approaches this middle school used to meet this challenge. Also, I focused on the families' interpretations of and reactions to these approaches. In addition, I sought to understand how these family interpretations had been shaped by their values, assumptions, priorities, and past experiences.

During the 1996-97 school year, I spent on average of 10-12 days a month in one middle school community in New York City. The data collected in this study came from a variety of sources: (1) formal and informal interviews with all the staff members in the school, with families, and with students; (2) observations of classroom interaction, staff meetings, parent association meetings, and parent/child/teacher conferences; (3) travel with students on a schoolwide three-day camping trip, on field and museum trips, and to basketball games; (4) visits to students' homes to meet their families, and to parents' workplaces; (5) collection of instructional materials, student work, and the school director's weekly memos.

In the middle of the school year, four students and their families were selected for in-depth study. This is a purposeful sample (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996), designed to reflect students and their families' diverse backgrounds. The selection process took into account the following dimensions: students' ethnicity, gender, grade, social visibility, academic growth, the number of the parents present in a household, and a family's social and economic status. While most of the data on students were collected in school settings, most of the data on families were collected in their homes. I paid special attention to these parents in school settings (e.g., observing them in parent/child/teacher conferences and in parent association meetings). I visited their homes or workplaces three times, on the average, between the beginning of February 1997 to the end of August 1997.

During the course of my fieldwork in the school community, I quickly developed trust with the school staff, students, and families, benefiting from the following factors: (1) the assistance of a colleague who had known the school director for a long time, (2) my minority but still relatively neutral cultural identity (Chinese), (3) my perceived status as a young researcher who was sincerely interested in their world views, and (4) my previous experience working with families from diverse cultural backgrounds in the same geographic area (Xu, 1994; Xu & Corno, 1998).

Data collected from the school, in general, and from the students and parents in the four families in particular, consists of over 1,500 pages of interview transcripts, 500 pages of fieldnotes, 20 hours of videotapes, and 25 pounds of student work and other school documents.

Data reduction for this article was guided by the existing literature discussed above, with the aid of SQR Nudist 4, a software package for analyzing qualitative data. It was also influenced by Banks' comprehensive reviews on multicultural education (1993 &1995). He noted the danger embedded in the line of research pursued by cultural difference theorists, who emphasize ethnic culture and devote little attention to other variables. He reminded us that "research related to effective teaching strategies for low-

income students and students of color needs to examine the complex interactions of race, class, and gender (1993. p.36)." Thus, when I wrote each case study, special attention was given to explore these complex interactions. Although the emphasis of this article is on the families' interpretation of their school's efforts to reach out - and not on effective teaching strategies - I feel that his recommendation is equally relevant here. Perhaps, by exploring these interactions, we will understand better what effective teaching strategies mean to low-income students and students of color, not just from researchers' perspectives and teachers' perspectives. For example, in her study on culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (1994 & 1995) used parent nomination of their children's teachers as one way to identify culturally relevant teachers. Once these teachers were identified, however, the mission of these parents was accomplished. Little data was drawn from parents or students' perspectives. Instead, her findings were based largely on her understanding of what each teacher said and did, leaving us little basis to judge how specific teaching strategies were perceived by students and their families.

I write each case separately to retain the holistic nature of the school/family interactions and perceptions in each family. These four cases then served as a basis for cross-case discussion. Interpretation based on data from multiple cases is more compelling than a single case study (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1984).

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze the data from the four case reports. Triangulation of different data sources and different perspectives were used as a means of enhancing internal validity and safeguarding against researcher bias (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1980; Yin, 1984).

Since this school was founded in 1990, it has kept its small size, including about 140 students in grades 6 through 8. The student body during the 1996-97 school year was 47% Latino, 34% African-American, and 10% Caucasian. Eighty-one percent received a free or reduced-price lunch.

Despite the school's ongoing effort to recruit teachers of color, the staff was less diverse than the student body. Only one of the nine full-time teachers was non-Caucasian.

The school used interrelated approaches, to reach out to students and their families from diverse backgrounds. You can see these four approaches listed on the handout, page 1, column 1. They included: (1) building a strong school community, (2) attending to students' personal and social needs, (3) emphasizing learning through experience and (4) providing expanded learning opportunities.

The first approach was to build a strong sense of school community. The director felt passionately that the students need to feel a sense of belonging, a sense they have a "home away from home," so they will be engaged, feel safe to learn, ask questions, and not worry about making mistakes in the process. For example, at the fall orientation, teamwork was stressed in athletic games. During the December festival of lights, staff, students, and families came together to celebrate and share their varied holiday traditions. Multiage grouping was applied to all subject areas - except math - to promote social interaction among students in all grade levels.

The second approach was to attend students' personal and social needs. The director explained, "If you don't deal with the whole child at this age, in particular, students are not going to learn....Learning to get along with each other [also] must be part of the curriculum. The school was organized into advisory groups, with each staff member mentoring a group of about 12 students. Advisory classes, held twice a week, became an important place where staff and students could voice personal concerns and share experiences. During the parent/child/teacher conferences, it was not unusual for a teacher to ask a student, "How do you feel here socially?" Several times a year, some students were given special awards for personal and social growth.

The third approach was to emphasize learning through experience. The school organized a variety of educational trips, for example, to see immigrant-history exhibits. Some classes took outdoor science field trips and others made drawings to-scale of real

buildings in the neighborhood. Hands-on projects, like building a motor-powered car, were often made a part of classroom activities.

The fourth approach was to provide expanded learning opportunities for students with learning disabilities, including computers, books on tapes, and other technologies, to help them learn better.

Sandra's case - We only have time to look briefly now at one student - Sandra - and her parents - the Curry family. Sandra was a fourteen-year-old in the 8th grade. She lived in a two-bedroom apartment in a city housing project, with her mother, an elder sister, and a younger brother. Mr. Curry, separated from the rest of the family for six years, lived about thirty blocks away. Both Mr. and Mrs. Curry are of African-American descent. Unemployed for several years, Mrs. Curry had no choice but to settle in a housing project, a place which she disliked and characterized as "a rough city."

Positive feedback from the Curry family - As summarized on the handout, page 1, column 3, we can see that the Curry family had many good things to say about the school her daughter attended. Mrs. Curry liked the small size of the school, which she felt prevented kids from "getting lost" - which was a big concern for her as the mother of a teenager girl living in an urban environment. She said, "A lot of parents start to lose their kids to the neighborhood at this age," Because their families lived in a "bad," unsafe area, their daughter "could have a whole lot of time to get out there and get into trouble," she explained.

Also, I vividly remember this mother telling me how impressed she was by the way this school had become a "family" for her daughter, because the staff members "show genuine care." They're really interested in your child." The child is treated like "a human being" and not just "a number" in the school. She was also impressed by the

school's personalized approach to her daughter, e.g. when her daughter became ill and the director went with her to emergency room and stayed there with her.

The Curry family also appreciated the many outside trips planned by sponsored by the school. Sandra enjoyed the free, three-day camping trip that was taken every fall to upstate New York. And Mrs. Curry confessed, "This was even an experience for me [as a parent volunteer] because I'd never been to a camp." You know, this approach of actually going outside to experience things matches the "learning techniques" of African-American children I've observed in my neighborhood." I think "you can help Black children more by taking them outside....That's how they learn....We learn more by actually doing something than reading about it or hearing about it."

In addition, Mrs. Curry appreciated the fact that "These kids get a chance to work on computers at school; that's really good." We can't afford to buy our daughter her own computer, but she can still learn about it, without lagging behind.

However, if you look more carefully at the handout, page 1, columns 2, 3, and 4, you'll notice that - except for attending to students' personal and social needs (the second approach) - there are subtle but interesting differences that existed between the school's intended purposes in these approaches and the parents' perceived values attached to them.

For example, in building a strong school community (the first approach), the school focused on creating a psychologically-safe place to promote learning, while the family viewed this approach more in terms of promoting physical safety, i.e., preventing kids from dropping out of school and getting into trouble on the street.

With the school's emphasizing learning through experience (the third approach) derived mainly from progressive education, the family praised it for matching how they perceived African-American children learned in everyday life, primarily operating from racial consciousness.

Likewise, with the school's providing expanded learning opportunities (the fourth approach), the school focused more on assisting students with learning disabilities, while

the parents were excited about the general computer access that the school provided - since they could not afford to buy one.

Negative feedback from the Curry family - Turning to page 2 of the handout, we see that other initiatives of the school that were perceived unfavorably - in fact, critically - by the family, despite the school's good intentions.

When the school opened, it wanted to focus the report card on personal and social growth and use it provide broader, more descriptive information in categories as attitude, effort, class participation, understanding of materials, and cooperative skills. In each category, the student was given a grade, which could range from honors, high pass, pass, low pass, through fail, accompanied with narrative comment. Almost all of Sandra's teachers praised her for her personality, attitude, and effort. One teacher wrote, "it was a real pleasure having you in class this semester....You are a good role model for your peers." Sandra regularly earned good grades, e.g., during the fall semester of 1996-97, she received 36 honors, 8 high passes and 7 passes. The Curry's took delight in looking at their daughter's report card.

So, it came as a real shock to Mrs. Curry, when an advisor told her that Sandra could not apply for some schools she would like because her reading and math scores on standardized tests were too low and these high schools would not accept her. Mrs. Curry became extremely upset because she felt that the school had not been honest with her: "With Black people, you've got to tell them point blank from day one what the deal is.... You cannot expect us to read between the lines." She was upset because she felt that the school wait so long to "tell us what the [real] deal is?"

In later October, Mrs. Curry received a letter from the school, recommending 3 high schools for Sandra, none of which Mrs. Curry liked - because they were all located in the middle of drug neighborhoods. For her, "That's like telling her to go and get into trouble." She wondered about the teachers' priorities and judgment (e.g., "What are they

looking at when they check these schools?"). She didn't think that teachers were trying to willfully place Sandra in drug infested areas. Still, she felt that the teachers were not members of "we" – race-wise and class-wise – who most suffer from and have to deal with the issue of drugs in their daily life, who know more about the set up and real danger of walking through drug areas, who have a sense of urgency to try to avoid them.

This issue of high application was further complicated by the school's new policy of filling out students' high school applications themselves, after they found out that often a tiny mistake, made by a parent filling out an application, could cause that application to be rejected for consideration.

Yet Mrs. Curry was very critical of this, saying, Who gave the school "the authority" and "the right" to fill out our children's applications? "These are *our children* we're talking about." "We get offended when somebody else tries to have more authority over our children than us." Both parents wanted to feel the pride of filling out their daughter's high school applications by themselves - and they felt that they had been denied this opportunity.

The family's reaction to this policy might have been less strong had there not been also a misunderstanding over high school program codes. There were two code systems, one for regular students and another for special ed. The school placed regular codes on Sandra's application. Yet, Mrs. Curry felt that her daughter should be given a special ed. code, if she had learning disability and needed special help. She remarked, "if you want to take that much responsibility, at least do it right."

As it turned out, resource room students were not considered the same as special students in New York. Nevertheless, the seemingly confused use of terms such as "special education," "learning disabilities," and "resource room" imposed on both the school and the family by the state deepened misunderstanding.

Influenced by progressive education, the school emphasized *trusting children*, viewing education as a process that children should help construct for themselves.

Therefore, the advisor felt that she had fulfilled her obligation relating to high school advisement, by largely talking to Sandra about it - and not involving her parents. However, Mrs. Curry responded, We as parents should have input in such a major decision as this, that affects our child. She felt you can sometimes give these kids *too much leeway* in making decisions, and they don't always make the best decisions.

Although Sandra's mother was never able to arrange for a meeting with the school adviser over Sandra's high school choices, she did receive repeated calls relating to Sandra's prom date. One girl used to Sandra's best friend; however their relationship had changed as Sandra started to date that girl's former boyfriend. Although the boy was not a student at the school, the reason behind their cooled relationship soon became common knowledge at school. The night before the prom, the Curry family received three phone calls – one from the school director, from Sandra's advisor, one from that's girl's advisor. All of them tried to dissuade Sandra from bringing the boy to the prom, afraid that there might be hurt feelings and even perhaps an outburst at the prom over this.

Mrs. Curry was deeply disturbed, saying that this dating, then breaking up, then going out with others is a normal part of teenage life. This is not something the school should make a big deal about. She was particularly puzzled how come she received more feedback from the school concerning this prom than she had about the far more important high school applications.

What can families bring that schools need to know? - If we look at handout, page 2, columns 3 and 4, we can see that most of the parents' criticisms arose, in Sandra's case, from "changes" which the school had initiated with good intent. In fact, these misunderstandings could have been easily avoided if the school had just continued "doing business as usual" - that is, issuing traditional report cards, letting parents fill out their kids' high school applications - whether they made mistakes or not - and shying away from getting involved in student "social crises." Much less time and effort would have

been required from the school, had they NOT wanted to explore ways in which they might make the school a more family-like place.

So, what can we learn from this case? It seems that school officials and teachers need to "hear" more than the static profiles of children and families, before they enter a school or a classroom. They need to be aware of the cultural views and life circumstances which children and their families bring to the school. Certainly, the school cannot separate itself – without serious consequences - from the personal perceptions and past experiences of the children and families they seek to engage and teach. It is also important for the school to keep open viable avenues "to hear" the ongoing perceptions and interpretations which families wish to voice about school policies and practices, so that they move beyond their assumptions about how they think families will respond. Hopefully, such a cultural sensitivity and ongoing dialogues can become part of the school's ongoing self-evaluation and self-improvement efforts.

Here I have tried to examine briefly how one school tried to reach out to students and families from diverse backgrounds and how these efforts were perceived by one family. As we can see from column 4, in both page 1 and page 2, these perceptions were mediated - by that family's expectations concerning the roles of the parent, child, and school, and their racial and class consciousness. These data suggest that we face a daunting challenge as we continue to seek ways to communicate across racial, cultural, social lines, or lines of unequal power (Delpit, 1995).

So, how can schools hear and learn not just from children's and families' life stories, but also their ongoing perceptions and interpretations of school practices and initiatives? What are the implications of this challenge for researchers? How can researchers be involved in this process, be more supportive of schools' initiatives on the one hand, and yet help them hear what children and families bring on the other hand? More specifically, what are our moral and ethical obligations to those schools who provide

us access, and who try with caring and daring to serve their students and families in better ways? And what are the moral and ethical obligations to the families?

Finally, whatever we are studying has broader implications. It's not just about one school that provided us access, but this involves other schools that may want to embark on similar initiatives. What kind of moral and ethical obligations do we face when we communicate our research to other schools and educators. Thus, the initial question of "What do children and families bring that their schools needs to hear?" becomes "what should researchers bring that other schools need to hear?"

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SCHOOL APPROACHES AND ONE FAMILY'S FAVORABLE RESPONSES

APPROACHES	MEANING TO THE SCHOOL	MEANING TO THE FAMILY	FACTORS MEDIATING THE FAMILY'S INTERPRETATION
Building a strong school community (e.g., through school's small size, multi-age grouping, and thirty-minute, twice-a-year T/P/C conferences)	Students need to feel a sense of belonging, a sense they have a "home away from home," so they will be engaged, feel safe to learn, ask questions, and not worry about making mistakes in the process.	The school should be made attractive to kids, to engage them to become involved in their classes and in learning. This counters the high dropout rate witnessed in many urban schools.	Concern for teenager girls in an urban environment (related to social/economic class, which may restrict where a family can live) -- "A lot of parents start to lose their kids to the neighborhood at this age." Because the family lived in a "bad," unsafe area, their daughters "could have a whole lot of time to get out there and get into trouble" (e.g., using drugs, getting pregnant, joining gangs, or becoming involved in criminal activities).
Attending to students' personal and social needs (e.g., through advisory groups, classes such as "Boys Talk" and "Girls Talk," and weekly staff meetings)	"If you don't deal with the whole child at this age, in particular, students are not going to learn.... Learning to get along with each other is also part of the curriculum." The school must become a "family."	Parents valued the "family aspect" of the school and were particularly impressed by the school's personalized approach to their daughter (e.g., when she became ill, the director went with her to the hospital emergency room).	Focus on the whole child -- The staff members "show genuine care. They're really interested in your child." My child was treated like a "human being" and not "just a number" in the school. Perhaps the fact that this child's parents had separated made the family more conscious and appreciative of other support systems which can help nurture an individual, particularly a child.
Emphasizing learning through experience (e.g., museum and field trips and hands-on learning projects, such as building a motor-powered car)	Education should be something that the child, at this age, is assuming responsibility to construct for himself or herself.	The many sponsored outside trips and the philosophy of "learning by doing" is important. "They let students *do* some things they're learning about, instead of just reading about them."	Racial consciousness -- African-American children have a different learning style from Whites. "To me, you can help Black children learn more by taking them outside the school.... We learn more by actually doing something than reading about it or hearing about it. We have to *do* it to 'see' it."
Providing expanded learning opportunities for students with learning disabilities, through the use of computers and other technologies	It is important that schools provide appropriate learning aids and programs for students with learning disabilities.	"These kids get a chance to work on computers at school; that's really good."	Class consciousness -- "If I don't have a friend that's comfortable with my kids visiting and using their computers and they don't have one at school, it would be a while before they get [a chance] to even work on computers. So they would be lagging behind in stuff like that. Basically, that's what happens to a lot of our kids."

SCHOOL APPROACHES AND THAT FAMILY'S CRITICAL RESPONSES

APPROACHES	MEANING TO THE SCHOOL	MEANING TO THE FAMILY	FACTORS MEDIATING THE FAMILY'S INTERPRETATION
Focusing the report card on personal and social growth (grading with: honors, high pass, pass, low pass, and fail, in a wide range of categories, with narrative)	The school wanted the child and parents to benefit from a more broad and descriptive progress report.	"If my daughter had a learning disability, why was she getting good marks?" ... "I think, by these marks, she's entitled to go to any school she wants."	Racial consciousness -- "With Black people, you've got to tell them point blank from day one what the deal is.... Our values are completely different [from those of Whites].... We don't like sugar-coating things. If a child is failing, it might hurt her feelings, but tell the child, 'Look, you're failing.'"
Recommending a list of high schools to the child	The school has more expertise in suggesting appropriate high schools.	Parents were disturbed to find that all of the recommended schools were located in the middle of drug neighborhoods.	Class consciousness -- "Personally, I think we know more about the presence of drugs [in various neighborhoods] than these teachers."
Filling out high school applications for the child and family	The school used to let parents fill out their children's applications, but found that numerous errors resulted in rejection of those applications.	The parents felt that the school had taken away from them the opportunity of filling out the high school applications for their children, a valued task.	Power (mediated by race) -- The family asked who gave the school "the authority" and "the right" to fill out their children's applications. "These are our children we're talking about" and "we get offended when somebody else tries to have more authority over our children than us." "I don't need them to fill out an application for my kid. I can do that myself."
Placing program codes on the applications, using one for regular students and another for special ed students	(Same as above)	The parent was puzzled why the school placed regular codes on her child's applications; she felt that the child should be given special ed codes, if she had learning disabilities and needed special help.	Education establishment -- Confusing terms (e.g., "special education," "learning disabilities," "resource room") imposed on the school and the family served to further alienate the family (e.g., "If you want to take that much responsibility, at least do it right.").
Working closely with the child, more than with parents (e.g., cancelling a meeting requested by the mother but repeatedly scheduling time to talk with her daughter)	Influenced by progressive education, school staff emphasized trusting children to assume a primary role in making decisions affecting them.	Making repeated efforts to schedule a face-to-face interview, the parent felt that the school had tried to avoid dealing with her; and so they undermined her role as a parent.	Roles of parents vs. children -- The school placed too much trust in children (e.g. "These kids will go along with anything you say, if it means less work. They want a free, easy time. I'm not hearing that."). This countered what she wanted for her child as a parent (e.g., "My daughter may have input into high school selection, but the final say of where she goes is mine."
Calling student's home three times about the child's prom date the night before the prom (by the school director and two advisors)	"If your daughter takes the ex-boyfriend of another student to the prom, there is probably going to be trouble." The school staff wanted the daughter "to see that, if she brought this boy, it would be like a slap in the face to the other girl."	The mother was disturbed by the school's excessive concern expressed over her daughter's prom date, feeling that this pressure was unfair for her daughter, as well as unnecessary (e.g., dating, breaking up, and going with others is a normal, expected part of teenage life; this is not something the school should make a big deal about).	Role of the school -- "Instead of the school just getting interested in children's learning, they are geared up more toward being involved with their home life and what they do after school and what their parents do." "I got more feedback from the school concerning this prom matter than I did about high school selection, and I'm very mad about it. I don't understand how they work."